Jimmy Luzzo

Western Political thought

Professor Cochran

Introduction Happiness

I used to think there was one school of thought for happiness; that it was being rich and famous or just rich. Over time I didn’t really know what it was because at one point I questioned everything about life in terms of why were here? Why we should even be happy? What is there to be happy about? How can we be happy about anything if it all comes to an inevitable end? It wasn’t until both my grandfathers died that I realized happiness is about living a successful life that ends at a reasonably old age. It is about achieving what you need to as a person and going to the grave knowing you fulfilled what you needed to as a person. That you were a good role model for everyone and set a good example to your prosperity and let all your loved ones know you loved them throughout all your life and at the very end. In this class, I learned that happiness was doing what your job is, and happiness is a life full of contemplation. I can’t really say either philosopher is wrong because I feel like both rightfully apply to happiness in life.

Plato The Republic: Happiness

Plato mentions early in the republic about old men and bitterness. The lack of happiness and old age aren’t related, the youth aren’t necessarily out of their minds happy and vice versa for older citizens. The old man he talked to was bitter, but it wasn’t out of old age it was possibly out of spending his younger years seeking happiness through nonorganic means. When you spend your younger years lustful and indulging your later years will be bitter and you will end up regretful of not spending that time more wisely. Cephalus on page 32 of the republic stated the inverse correlation of age and happiness himself, “If they possess well-regulated souls and easy tempers, old age itself is no intolerable burden: if they are differently constituted, why in that case, Socrates, they find even youth as irksome to them as old age.” It was also mentioned that riches aren’t the root of happiness for if people make it because they love it rather than out of need it makes them disagreeable companions, because they will praise nothing but riches.” (Plato 33) Money is chiefly valuable for the decent and orderly man. Money only used to survive and lived comfortably not gained through bad means should make man appropriately happy. The happiest person is the justest person because their soul is in the right order because their reason controls their desires. He describes the most sound and just man, “And for his bodily habit and bodily support, in the second place, far from living devoted the indulgence of brute irrational pleasure, he will show that even health is no object with him, and that he does not attach pre-eminent importance to the acquisition of strength or health or beauty, unless they are likely to make him temperate; because, in keeping the harmony of the body in tune, his constant aim is to preserve the harmonic symphony which resides in the soul.”(Plato 128)This all correlates to happiness because Plato says that the happiest man is just because they aren’t a slave to their desires. The unjust person is unhappy because they are slaves to their desires. Plato mentions that the vilest men are unjust who only care about excess wealth and who indulge in their desires, “Or, it being admitted that, had he taken gold to sell a son or daughter into slavery, and a slavery among wild and wicked masters, it could have done him no good to receive even an immense sum for such a purpose, will it be argued that, if he ruthlessly enslaves the most divine part of himself to the most ungodly and accursed, he is not a miserable man, and is *not* being bribed to a far more awful destruction than Eriphyle, when she took the necklace as the price of her husband’s life.”(Plato 127) This is the worst end of living with what you need where you indulge in excess and you become too obsessed with materialistic goods instead of living in moderation. This would make you the most miserable and least happy because you aren’t experiencing a fulfilling life it’s more short-term, living justly as in living in moderation and doing what you feel you need to do in life is truly the happiest form according to Plato.

Aristotle: Nicomachean ethics

I learned from Aristotle that happiness is a life full of contemplation. Contemplation for humans is a gift from God himself that animals don’t have the pleasure of having. Animals don’t have the exact mind that humans do. Humans and animals have overlapping traits such as instincts and anger happiness and fear. One can argue that since animals can feel all these emotions then animals can be happy too. That’s correct, but animals can’t contemplate to the depths that humans can. Humans can go outside of the depths of happiness from eating after being hungry like animals can, but animals can’t think about their purpose in life or fulfilling a destiny greater than themselves or leaving a mark on this world. They can merely think wow I’m no longer starving that’s great. One can also argue that animals should be truly the happiest because they don’t know they will die, and they can’t question the meaning of life. It was steadfastly argued by Aristotle however that contemplation and happiness extend to the same depth, “Happiness extends, then, just so far as contemplation does, and those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not as a mere concomitant but in virtue of the contemplation: for this precious. Happiness, therefore, must be some form of contemplation.” (Aristotle 162) Aristotle also argued that happiness is being healthy as a need for external prosperity. We can only need so many necessities that we can’t go beyond that, “We can do noble acts without ruling earth or sea: for even with moderate advantages one can act virtuously.”(Aristotle 162) Aristotle argued here that we don’t need to go above and beyond for self-sufficiency we only really need what we need, “For the life of the man who is active in accordance with virtue will be happy.”(Aristotle 162) Solon and Anaxagoras both made arguments about how a man can be truly happy and live a temperate life with modest possessions. Aristotle also argues that happiness is reason, “Life according to reason is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else *is* man. This life therefore is also the happiest.” (Aristotle 161) Aristotle also mentioned that life doing things outside of just the virtue of reason is also happiness, “In a secondary degree the life in accordance with the other kind of virtue is happy: for the activities in accordance with this befit our human estate.” (Aristotle 161) Aristotle said contemplation is also a gift because of the ability to have boundless thoughts and the ability to think itself is a gift, ‘Objects of reason are the best of knowable objects; and secondly it is the most continuous, since we can contemplate truth more continuously than we can *do* anything. And we think happiness ought to have pleasure mingled with it, but the activity of philosophic wisdom is admittedly the pleasantest of virtuous activities; at all events the pursuit of it is thought to offer pleasures marvelous for their purity and their enduringness and it is to be expected that those who know will pass their time more pleasantly than those who inquire.” It was also said about how amusement isn’t really happiness because a virtuous life doesn’t have amusement, “The happy life is thought to be virtuous: now a virtuous life requires exertion, and does not consist in amusement.” (Aristotle 160) This coincides with what Aristotle says later in the book about happiness because life with virtues is a happy one. Virtuous person is happiest

Conclusion

I learned two schools of thought from these philosophers: contemplation is the true depth of happiness because of its preciousness, and Happiness is living a life of moderation when you’re younger so you can live a happy end. I enjoyed reading Aristotle more so I thought I would instantly think his was more accurate, but Plato’s argument about living a moderate life and not necessarily being rich seemed the best. Contemplation is a gift but also a curse because dogs can’t question the meaning of life the depth of contemplation is not what Aristotle cracks it up to be. Animals live without contemplation, which allows them to not think about death or thinking that nothing really matters and that they’re just a speck of dust that will have an inevitable end. I think my school of thought overlaps a lot with Plato because I realized life isn’t about living in great excess fulfilling all your needs beyond need and into want. Its about living with what you need and leaving earth happy instead of bitter and regretful. However, Aristotle’s thought on how knowledge and the ability to know is pleasant. It is about how knowledge is better than inquiring and I like that because you just know about everything, and you can be a knowledgeable person and can live without the seek of knowledge and already have it. I also agree with what Plato says about how a life of greed and excess is like slavery where you are a slave to your desires as opposed to living a temperate modest life. I can now see where my former perception of a happy life can now seem overrated and not what I made it up to be. Despite being able to know about your death, knowledge and a life of contemplation is a gift because knowledge provides more prudence and more mental strength and the knowledge of knowing what would happen if you indulged in your desires. That’s where I feel like Plato and Aristotle’s thoughts converge and I agree with what both say about happiness and how knowledge is a gift. I never thought of happiness as knowledge before but now I can totally see it and agree with it.